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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1234  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1101  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1670  
RUEAWJA/DOJ WASHDC  
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1394  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000258

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [ELAB](#) [KWMN](#) [SMIG](#) [ASEC](#) [TX](#)  
SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: NGOS COMMENT ON CURRENT  
TRAFFICKING-IN-PERSONS ISSUES

REF: A. ASHGABAT 0156  
[1](#)B. 07 ASHGABAT 1387  
[1](#)C. 07 ASHGABAT 1400

Classified By: CDA RICHARD E. HOAGLAND: 1.4 (B), (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: According to the three non-governmental organizations active in assisting trafficking victims in Turkmenistan, Trafficking in Persons (TIP) is currently not an overwhelming problem, but could grow in Turkmenistan if economic conditions become more difficult. While these organizations still must work under the radar, all were encouraged with the tacit acknowledgement that TIP is a problem via the announcement of the "Combatting Trafficking in Persons" law in December 2007 (Refs A and B). Disagreeing with the OSCE and ABA-CEELI (Ref C), one suggested that the (current) Criminal Code of 1997 offers enough latitude to address TIP on a criminal basis and that no new criminal legislation is needed. All agreed that young, uneducated women from the provinces are at most risk of becoming TIP victims. More data collection is needed, most likely with the help of these NGOs, since the Government of Turkmenistan -- which still insists that the passage of the new TIP law is a preventive measure -- remains reluctant to provide statistics, be they positive or negative. END SUMMARY.

INTRODUCTION TO TURKMENISTAN'S NGOS WORKING ON TIP

[1](#)2. (C) On February 4, 5, and 7, representatives of non-governmental organizations working in Turkmenistan separately discussed their observations about TIP. Keik Okara is one of the few truly non-governmental organizations operating legally in Turkmenistan, since it has been registered as a center assisting youth from low-income families since 2004. In addition to providing a wide variety of training to youth on TIP and other topics, Keik Okara runs a law clinic in Atamurat, a city close to Turkmenistan's

border with Afghanistan, that assists refugees and Turkmenistan's citizens to procure passports. Bosfor is another local organization, providing legal assistance and advice to asylum seekers and UNHCR-recognized refugees from Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Russia, China, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. It also operates a law library that is open to the public. As a sub-organization of the Youth Union, it has a quasi-governmental status. The American Bar Association's Central European and Eurasia Law Initiative (ABA-CEELI) provides a variety of legal technical assistance programs all over Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, including in Turkmenistan.

#### ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE NGO'S

13. (C) In 2007, the local International Organization for Migration (IOM) representative sent eight TIP victims to Keik Okara for education, vocational training, and legal services. Bosfor did not say how many victims it helped, and ABA-CEELI characterized its involvement as training lawyers, rather than working with victims. ABA-CEELI held its first training program in January 2008 on Turkmen legislation and international standards. Eleven program lawyers who work within about 30 target communities in Turkmenistan's five provinces took part in the program, which also included information on TIP.

#### TURKMENISTAN'S TIP DEMOGRAPHICS AND SCENARIOS

14. (C) All NGO representatives agreed that most victims are uneducated women aged 16-30, from Lebap or Dashoguz provinces. Many of them come from broken homes, or are

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divorced and have children to support. The relative naivete of some Turkmen, stemming from the country's long, self-imposed isolation, leaves them open to TIP schemes. Victims often become prey to TIP when they agree to go abroad to work as household staff or study. The opportunities overseas that they believe they are pursuing are fictitious, and instead the women are forced into prostitution. ABA-CEELI suggested that since most Turkmen have not traveled and don't know visa application procedures, they easily become TIP victims after giving their passports to the traffickers. In addition, through not understanding which documents are usually required for educational visa applications, they are actually trafficked under the pretense of traveling to school when an education visa application was never even filed.

15. (C) Keik Okara Director Roza Kuzakhmedova said that she heard that women are being trafficked to Algeria, Sudan, Tunisia, England, and Thailand, in addition to Turkey and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and ABA-CEELI added Cyprus to the list. Several of these are ideal trafficking destinations, because visas for these countries are cheap or free. Bosfor Director Zalina Rossoshanskaya suggested that Iran is another destination country. Rossoshanskaya added that seemingly legitimate advertisements and websites have been successful in attracting TIP victims who do not come from the stereotypical demographic background, even admitting that one of her staff almost fell victim when she received a sophisticated, personalized e-mail invitation to attend a conference in Dubai. Sometimes women become victims through those who are close to them, such as friends.

#### VICTIMS FIND HELP FROM NGOS VIA WORD OF MOUTH

16. (C) All of the representatives offer victims assistance very quietly. While the local IOM representative said that he had the impression that sympathetic law enforcement officers were directing TIP victims to IOM for services (reftel), none of these NGO representatives mentioned this happening. Instead, victims find the NGOs upon hearing of their services from friends or random kind people who happen to know of the NGOs' work. Kuzakhmedova said that Keik Okara

assists TIP victims without the knowledge of the Government of Turkmenistan, adding that she hopes that the government will officially accept Keik Okara's work in the future, because President Berdimuhamedov has emphasized helping youth in many of his speeches. All Bosfor personnel are lawyers who worked previously in government organizations, and know Turkmenistan's legal system from the inside. Bosfor's staff have used their experience to their advantage, for example in locating a TIP victim within Turkmenistan's prison system and repatriating her to Moldova. ABA-CEELI held its first training program for 11 program lawyers in Turkmenistan's five provinces on Turkmen legislation and international standards, including information on TIP.

#### TIP TRAFFICKING TRENDS IN TURKMENISTAN

¶7. (C) All of the NGO representatives anticipate an upswing in TIP in Turkmenistan, due to worsening economic conditions that could increase peoples' vulnerabilities. Kuzakhmedova said that Turkmenistan Airlines pilots have reported that "many" TIP victims are returning from Istanbul as deportees, with some of the same faces showing up on these flights over and over again, indicating that some are transitioning from victim to willing participant. This also indicates that, since deportees should not receive travel documents again, corruption is part of the process at some point because they are finding their way back into Turkey multiple times. Some

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of the victims are forced to work in a factory during the day, and as prostitutes at night. In some cases, a whole family is trafficked, with each family member working for a different person.

#### BOSFOR COMMENTS ON NEW ANTI-TRAFFICKING LAW

¶8. (C) Bosfor representatives said that the December 2007 law on "Combating Trafficking in Persons" (reftel) references the Criminal Code written in 1997, which provides some framework for punitive enforcement of TIP-related activity such as kidnapping of women for the purposes of marriage and transporting people over borders against their will. Rossoshanskaya said that because Turkmenistan's TIP activity is still relatively low, the new "Combating Trafficking in Persons" law, combined with the existing Criminal Code, is enough to fight TIP at its current rate. (NOTE: As a basis of comparison, the Russian Federation added two articles to its Criminal Code on punishment for TIP in 2004. END NOTE.)

¶9. (C) COMMENT: For many years, TIP has been such a sensitive issue in Turkmenistan that it has been impossible to discuss it with any organization other than IOM. The announcement in December 2007 of the "Law on the Battle against Trafficking in Persons" and other statements made by the president have given these NGOs some hope for their work in this area. The tacit acknowledgement that the problem exists opened the doors to discussing the breadth and depth of the problem. With this opening, post hopes to expand its engagement with these NGOs. END COMMENT.

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